

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

August 21, 1968

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MEMORANDUM FOR WALT ROSTOW
GEORGE CHRISTIAN
NAT DAVIS

SUBJECT: Czechoslovakia -- An American Intelligence Failure

We all recall newspaper stories of last week suggesting a possible 'intelligence failure' on the part of U.S. intelligence concerning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The September 2, 1968, U.S. News raises the subject again (copy attached).

While the events in Chicago this week have eclipsed this particular question, we might well anticipate some returning Congressmen will raise the issue next week or shortly thereafter -- perhaps even calling for a congressional investigation.

I suggest we ask State and Defense, perhaps CIA as well, to submit press guidance on how to handle questions on this general subject -- and, after reviewing that guidance, we agree on what constitutes the best public posture on this issue.


Lou Schwartz

O.K. _____

See me _____

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War Tempo Steps Up

SAIGON—The relative lull in the Vietnam war ended in mid-August. Scattered fighting broke out all over the country. Saigon came under rocket attack for the first time since June 21.

Did the flare-up herald the long-awaited "third offensive" by Hanoi and the Viet Cong? Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, commander of American forces in South Vietnam, sent word to President Johnson that he foresaw "heavy fighting" in the weeks ahead.

wounding 69. Two of the rockets blew away part of the corrugated-tin roof of the Parliament building.

The fighting began to develop throughout the country on August 18—mostly in small actions involving Communist units ranging in size from a squad to a regiment of perhaps 500 men. U.S. officials found no discernible pattern to the attacks.

The initial break in the lull developed at Tay Ninh, a provincial capital near the Cambodian border, 55 miles north

unit walked into a trap. The unit passed between two outposts of the U.S. 23rd Infantry Division. Once past, the enemy was attacked from the rear and pounded by artillery. Nearly all were killed.

For a week, there were scattered missile attacks from the Demilitarized Zone to deep within the Mekong Delta far to the south.

Action then shifted to the north, with Communist attacks including an assault on August 23 against Da Nang, South Vietnam's second-largest city. A barrage of 36 rockets fell into the U.S. Marine and Air Force base.

The ratio of enemy killed to Americans

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Russian Invasion—a "Failure" of U. S. Intelligence?

WASHINGTON—In the wake of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the view widely held here is that official Washington—including the White House—was caught flatfooted.

Congress, when it reconvenes, is certain to hear calls for an investigation of another "intelligence failure."

In any such investigation, these are major points likely to be advanced—

- President Johnson first learned that the invasion was under way from Russian Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin—not from U. S. intelligence sources.

- Less than a week before the invasion, high U. S. officials were expressing convictions in private that Russia would not use armed force in the crisis.

- When the invasion came on August 20 (EDT), a State Department official admitted, "We were surprised."

- Intelligence reports seemed to stress Russia's *capability* to invade Czechoslovakia, but missed out on Russia's *intent* to do so.

Administration view. Answering the criticisms, Administration spokesmen claim that intelligence teams were "pretty sharp in calling the shots."

They say the White House was warned at least a week before the invasion that Russia and its allies—in border maneuvers—were setting up the machinery to support an invasion.

And, on the very day of the invasion, these sources say, the possibility of a Russian armed move was brought up at a White House luncheon attended by the President, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford. This point was given:

"They discussed not only the possibil-

ity but even the probability there might be an invasion. The consensus was there might be a move against the Czechs."

Pentagon concern. Some U. S. military leaders were despondent as "almost alarmed" that the invasion was pulled off with what they saw as tight security. Said one source:

"They did this right under our noses. We were watching. The Czech crisis was on us—high priority. But we missed the movement."

Emphasized by the military is this fact: Armies of five countries were involved, but there was no breach of security or secrecy.

Particular surprise was achieved in the air movement of men and material from Russia by between 120 and 150 flights. Electronic spy devices told U. S. intelligence when each plane took off.

But radio silence and evasive flight patterns hid any indication of where the planes were going.

The camouflage. How Russia was able to conceal the invasion was described in these terms—

Strategically, the intent to invade was hidden by "reconciliation" talks that seemed to make invasion unnecessary.

Tactically, preparations were clouded by maneuvers along the Czech border.

But, however the surprise was achieved, a great many officials shared the view expressed by Representative William E. Minshall (Rep.), of Ohio—

"American security is gravely threatened if we are to continue to be vulnerable to surprise moves by the Communists such as we have just witnessed."

(*The Kremlin leaders*, p. 12; *Czech crisis: a new threat to peace?* p. 23)

SOVIET INVADERS in Prague. In Washington, concern is being expressed over an apparent lapse by U. S. intelligence agencies in detecting Russia's intentions.

—Wide World Photo

